

cal story. But her contributions did not stop there. She overwhelmed the director, Albert Pertalion, with the loan of The Annotated Sherlock Holmes, and persuaded him to eschew camp and avoid cliché. The result was a faithful, Paget-like version of Sherlock Holmes. The sincere approach contributed immeasurably to the production's success, and to the critical Plainsmen's enjoyment. The Plainsmen also looked forward to seeing the play's 221B when they learned that MRT was importing Howard Bay, veteran of 170 Broadway shows and winner of two Tonys, to do the sets and lighting.

The Great Alkali Plainsmen plus visitors from scions elsewhere made up an enthusiastic theater party on September 17th, but in fact they stretched the fun to two nights. They began over dinner at The Maggie Jones the night before, enjoying the rare 1931 film version of The Speckled Band, with Raymond Massey as Sherlock Holmes and Lyn Harding -- who had pioneered his role on stage in 1910 -- as Grimesby Roylott. The Plainsmen sharpened their knowledge of the story with a nasty quiz, the winners receiving Vikki's original costume design sketches for Holmes, Watson, and Roylott. The Plainsmen were also privileged to hear Howard Bay discuss his designs of the sets, especially 221B. The Plainsmen returned to The Maggie Jones the next evening for a pre-theater dinner, and a brief program that featured Vikki Marshall doing a reverse-striptease demonstrating the wonders of Victorian ladies' clothing, assisted by a progressively less enthusiastic Stan Carmack. Since Philip Shreffler spoke first, he was wise to keep it brief -- essentially reading his Great Alkali Plainsmen's Classics Number Two:

THE SNAKE WITH SPOTS ON

ONCE UPON A TIME, JULIA STONER DIED. JULIA'S SISTER HELEN SAW IT HAPPEN. ALSO HANGING AROUND WAS AN EVIL GIANT CALLED GRIMESBY WHO WAS A CHEATER AND A BABOON.

HELEN WAS SORE AFRAID AND WENT TO SEE SHERLOCK HOLMES, WHO IS A DETECTIVE.

JULIA WAS WEARING A NIGHTGOWN WHEN SHE DIED, AND SHERLOCK SAID HE WANTED TO SPEND THE NIGHT IN HELEN'S BEDROOM. HELEN DECIDED THIS WAS JUST FINE.

IN HELEN'S BEDROOM, A SNAKE CAME FROM SOMEWHERE, AND SHERLOCK HIT IT WITH A STICK. THE SNAKE DRANK MILK AND BIT GRIMESBY, WHO DIDN'T WHISTLE AFTER THAT.

WOULD YOU?

The scene then shifted to the theater, where the Plainsmen enjoyed the play tremendously. They closed the evening with a tour of the theater and a cocktail party with the cast.

In the programme notes, the director had challenged the Plainsmen: "I've added two lines from the Speckled Band short story to the play for the simple reason that they were too good to omit. So prodigious is the awareness of the Holmes canon by the Baker Street Irregulars that I fully expect them to spot the two added lines." The archives do not record anyone having had the perspicacity to do so; probably the Sherlockians present were enjoying themselves too much. The MRT offered Holmes as Holmes: a far cry indeed from the burlesqued Gillette that had offended Plainsmen back in 1976. MRT guest

artist Rand Bridges gave the role a crisp, assured portrayal, and his Watson avoided the Nigel Bruce interpretation followed by so many impersonators of the good doctor. Grimesby Roylott may not have been quite Lyn Harding's menacing bear, but William Kuehlke put what he called "a lifetime of suppressed aggression" into the role. Both the Daily Journal and the Kansas City Star criticized the play's weak first act, but praised the production in all other respects, the Star calling Rand Bridges "the Sherlock Holmes every theatergoer dreams of." And the curtain never went up on Howard Bay's 221B without a round of applause.

"One hears such dreadful stories."

Daily Journal No. 38 (October 20, 1983) reviewed the MRT production, and also reprinted "The Body Beside the Tracks", its first appearance since 1977. It was true, as Editor Lehman explained, that many travellers in the caravan had not had a chance to read it -- but something else was secretly afoot. Just as Jesse James was shot down by some of his own gang, so Lehman was planning a little skulduggery at Brother Perry's expense. In late August he had heard from Richard Warner of The Afghanistan Perceivers of Tulsa. Warner had been mulling over Milt's theory (without having read Milt's paper first, he later admitted), and thought to see vulnerabilities in it. Lehman realized that Milt would not take such a challenge lightly. "It may be wise at this time," Lehman wrote Warner in September, "to pick your seconds, and think very carefully about a choice of weapons."

Lehman gave Milt a copy of Warner's letter in September; at least he told Warner that he had done so. Warner took advantage of finally reading Milt's paper in the Daily Journal to hone his attack upon "The Body Beside the Tracks" for subsequent publication, in our own newsletter. It is clear that Lehman was looking forward to a fracas, while counting on Milt's notorious streak of procrastination to forestall any quick rebuttal. "I think we can have a lot of fun with this," he chortled in a letter to Margaret Baldwin: "What tickles me is that the last issue was a sleeper. Now in the next issue the bomb will explode. Those wondering why on earth we reprinted "Body" are going to find out. I'll put some nonsense at the close of Warner's article to the effect that Milt will reply in the next issue. In fact I rather doubt that Milt will be able to move himself to reply to anything. He has left the matter entirely in my hands. Foolish boy."*

* When Lehman wrote to Margaret, now Margaret Weis again, it was to her new home in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. She had left the Plainsmen caravan in October to take a position at TSR, the fantasy game designers, as their in-house writer. Wondrous have been her accomplishments: Margaret is now co-author of the highly successful "Dragonlance" series of fantasy novels published by TSR. Readers of her Dragonlance books will find sly references to "Plainsmen" in them: a tribe of barbarians, unable to behave in an orderly fashion; devoted to games and contests, which they enjoy almost as much as warring on their neighbors; occasionally green-tinged of mornings from their excesses of the nights before. Margaret knows her scion society well.

A leisurely evening was spent at The Maggie Jones on November 5th, when Ely Liebow, author of Dr. Joe Bell: Model for Sherlock Holmes, came to town, to talk to a medical association about Arthur Conan Doyle's medical mentor at Edinburgh University. Ely, one of Hugo's Companions of Chicago, had lectured on Bell at John Bennett Shaw's Rockhurst workshop, and the Plainsmen were delighted to schedule a return engagement and hear it all again. This was the kind of scholarly talk they appreciated -- though Ely aroused his hosts' competitive instincts by innocently remarking that he enjoyed visiting a scion not as intent upon getting plastered as Hugo's drunken Companions. He brought the Plainsmen close that night to Dr. Bell and the Edinburgh of the 1870s, making clear the doctor's important contribution to the Master and his Method.

Daily Journal No. 39 reported Ely's visit; it also printed Richard Warner's assault on the Great Alkali Plainsmen's cherished folklore. "The Body Beside the Tracks Was a Red Herring" was its piscatorially provocative title, and indeed it did resemble a herring that has been left out on the Plain a little too long. With bizarre arguments having mainly to do with the naming of boats (Oklahomans being famous for their knowledge of the sea), Warner claimed that Sherlock Holmes did not visit Kansas City in 1880 because he had already visited Kansas City in 1876 -- stopping here briefly en route to Topeka to catch a good meal there at the first Harvey House. (Lysander Starr, in Warner's clutches, became a used wagon-dealer, billing himself as "the Mayor of Topeka" to impress the greenhorns.) Tracing Holmes from Topeka to New Orleans by way of Lawrence, Chanute, Coffeyville, Altamont, and points south in the Oklahoma Territory, Warner ended by claiming that the Master had walked across what is now his front lawn. "Ineffable twaddle!" was the response from as far away as southern Illinois, where Newt Williams, BSI, the chief Occupant of the Empty House, wryly commented: "Methinks Dick Warner perceiveth too much."

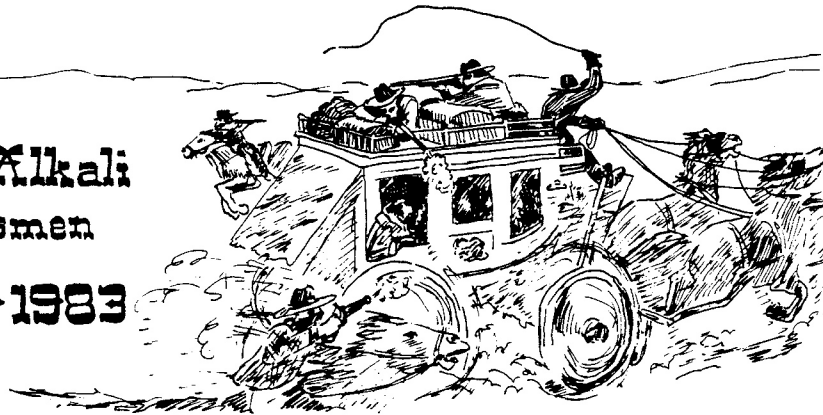
Indignation ran high at the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle at The Maggie Jones on December 27th. According to Daily Journal No. 40 (July 13, 1984),

Milt Perry leaped to his feet and demanded a hearing. Objecting to the publication in the KCDJ of Warner's "The Body Beside the Tracks Was a Red Herring," Milt outlined his views on the paper itself. To counter Warner's opinion that Holmes once visited Oklahoma, Milt read from the writings of John H. Watson the following passage: "In the central portion of the great North American Continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert, which for many a long year served as a barrier against the advance of civilization. From the Sierra Nevada to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado upon the south, is a region of desolation and silence." Basing his thesis upon this text, Milt argued syllogistically that no one in his right mind would journey to such a place, that Sherlock Holmes was in his right mind, therefore Sherlock Holmes would never have visited those dark and dreadful regions now occupied by the state of Oklahoma. To clinch his argument, Milt produced the 1836 picture puzzle map of the United States which he had won as a prize. Milt showed that the map referred to Oklahoma as "The Great American Desert", with a note under that descriptive caption that this land was traversed by nothing but herds of buffalo and wild Indians.

Nowhere was there any reference to "Tulsa". Milt demanded that Warner prove the existence of such a place before tampering with the proper running of the White Star liner Empress Queen. [See Baring-Gould - JLL]

Other parts of the Feast were more peaceful: Carolyn Underwood describing how to exploit interlibrary loan to drain away for Kansas City the Sherlockian holdings of other communities, and Ernest Willer honored as the scion's senior founder at the close of its twentieth year. Other entertainments had been scheduled as well, but a howling storm forced an early adjournment. The Plainsmen rushed out to struggle home through the snow, leaving Lehman staring at an overrun dinner bill of \$107.70.

THE
Great Alkali
Plainsmen
1963-1983



After 1983, it becomes a bit harder to set forth the history of The Great Alkali Plainsmen. The archives help fill the cracks, but the scion's Daily Journal of record began to appear three times a year, instead of five, and reports of scion meetings were no longer submitted to The Baker Street Journal. The Avenging Angel had begun to find it difficult to maintain the newsletter's normal schedule, and cope with the considerable volume of correspondence that follows in its wake.

Yet 1984 began auspiciously for him. He had not gone to New York for the BSI dinner on January 6th, but he and other Plainsmen marked the Master's birthday that Friday night by watching three Sherlock Holmes movies at the City Movie Center (Douglas Fairbanks Sr.'s 1915 Mystery of the Leaping Fish, a 1912 Copper Beeches, and Rathbone's Hound), with a small jollification afterwards at The Maggie Jones. When Lehman returned home late that night, a telephone call from New York informed him of his brand-new investiture in the BSI, as "The Danite Band".

The first Plainsmen meeting of the year occurred on March 10th with what Lehman called an invasion by a horde of entirely uninvited Noble Bachelors. They rolled into town on the Missouri Pacific out of St. Louis -- five weary hours en route, engaged in fruitless imitation of the murder mysteries the

Plainsmen carry off so well at their costume parties. The prize for the best solution was won by a Bachelor who managed to deduce the murder's means and motive correctly -- never mind her having accused an entirely innocent person of being the murderer. Perhaps the Noble Bachelors lacked proper inspiration: a club car burglary the night before had wiped out the train's liquor supply. It was a rather desperate crew that plodded into Crown Center that afternoon.

And a mean one, too. The dinner that night featured the return of Killer Lavazzi, to cast aspersions anew upon the Great Alkali Plainsmen. Warming up on Jon Lellenberg (1500 miles away), Lavazzi roasted John Lehman, Charles Wheeler, Stan Carmack, and Milt Perry as well. Daily Journal No. 41 (October 13, 1984) records that Milt's dinner companions had to send out for oxygen to revive him from the speechlessness into which he sank upon hearing Lavazzi's remarks: "Let us also raise a glass of red-eye to Milt Perry, distinguished historian and curator of the Jesse James Farm. Durned if I can figger why anyone would want to grow outlaws, though. What do you use for fertilizer, Milt?" Throughout all this, Shreffler resolved his conflict of interest between the two scion societies by cowering in his room, sending a message that he was "indisposed", and leaving it to his embarrassed wife to read his Great Alkali Plainsmen's Classics Number Three:

THE THING THAT THE MUSGRAVES SAID A LOT

SHERLOCK HOLMES (WHO IS A DETECTIVE) GOT OUT HIS TOY BOX AND PLAYED WITH SOME STRING. ONCE, A FRIEND FROM SCHOOL CAME TO SHERLOCK'S HOUSE. HE SAID THAT THE BUTLER DID IT, AND THEN THE BUTLER WENT AWAY. THERE WAS SOMEBODY NAMED RACHEL IN THIS STORY, BUT NOT FOR LONG.

SHERLOCK'S FRIEND TOLD HIM ABOUT A POEM. BUT IT WASN'T VERY GOOD BECAUSE IT DIDN'T RHYME. SHERLOCK WENT TO HIS FRIEND'S HOUSE AND HELPED HIM WITH HIS MATH HOMEWORK. THEN THEY WENT TO PLAY IN THE CELLAR. THE BUTLER WAS DOWN THERE TOO, BUT HE WOULDN'T PLAY BECAUSE HE WAS DEAD. SHERLOCK'S FRIEND FOUND SOME JUNK IN A LAKE. THEN THEY DID THEIR HISTORY HOMEWORK.

THIS STORY DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

Down in southeastern Kansas, the town of Altamont planned to celebrate its 100th anniversary in June, and John Lehman thirsted for another meeting there with The Afghanistan Perceivers. What he really thirsted for was a shoot-out in the streets of Altamont, between Milt Perry and Dick Warner. Glenda Roberts stood ready to make local arrangements again, with undertakers if necessary. Milt was nothing loath, and he began to clean and prime his Jesse James Facsimile Shooting-Irons for the fray. Lehman wrote to Stafford Davis and Dick Warner in February to propose the meeting-cum-duel. "Is your blood lust up?" he queried Warner: "At our last meeting, Milt Perry declared your paper to be a paltry fabrication." But gunfire never broke out in Altamont. The Perceivers displayed the better part of valor, not even answering the frustrated Lehman's letters, as far as the archives reveal.*

* Dick Warner reports that he took advice among the Afghanistan Perceivers

The Plainsmen met instead at The Maggie Jones on July 28th to hear Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor performed on the violin by the talented member of the Lehman family, John's cousin Katie -- justified by Lehman mumbling a few pseudo-Sherlockian comments under his breath about "wanting to introspect". The scholarly note was restored afterwards by a reading of Shreffler's Great Alkali Plainsmen's Classics Number Four:

THE HORSE WITH THE SILVER NOSE

SHERLOCK HOLMES, WHO IS A DETECTIVE, SAID THAT HE HAD TO GO. A HORSE WHO LIVED IN TAVISTOCK DIDN'T LIVE THERE ANY MORE. JOHN STRAKER, A DEAD MAN, DIDN'T LIVE ANYWHERE ANY MORE. THE HORSE KILLED HIM. BUT YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW THIS UNTIL LATER.

THEN THE HORSE GOT ALL COVERED IN SHOE POLISH OR SOMETHING. THEN HE WON A RACE, BUT SHERLOCK WIPED OFF THE SHOE POLISH ANYWAY. THIS TOOK COLONEL ROSS'S BREATH AWAY.

THE HORSE WAS HARDLY IN THE STORY AT ALL. NEITHER WAS THE DOG.

(SIR CANNON DOYLE COULDN'T WRITE VERY GOOD ANIMAL STORIES.)

Shreffler's Classics Number Five appeared in Daily Journal No. 41 as well,

regarding the duel, as he wished to accept the challenge, but he admits that his own archives contain no trace of any reply to Lehman's proposal. However, he now states that he does not believe there is such a person as Milt Perry, claiming instead that the Great Alkali Plainsmen have created a fictitious personality to excuse things like an incorrect date for the Master's visit to Kansas City: "Milt Perry said this, Milt Perry said that."

"I have never seen Milt Perry," Warner complains in a recent letter to this historian. "I have never had a letter from Milt Perry. I have never talked to Milt Perry on the telephone. I spoke before the Great Alkali Plainsmen in Kansas City several years ago and there was no Milt Perry present. I visited the Jesse James Farm and it was closed." And while Warner (signing himself "The Tulsa Terror") claims to be prepared to undergo the shoot-out still, he has now set the identification requirements for Milt Perry so high as to make them virtually impossible to satisfy. Plainsmen may draw their own conclusions as to Warner's ulterior motives.

For the historical record, let it be pointed out now that Dick Warner was one of the Afghanistan Perceivers who attended the Great Alkali Plainsmen meeting at the Savoy Grill on August 21, 1976 -- at which time John Bennett Shaw's quiz was won by none other than Milt Perry. So Dick Warner has seen Milt Perry (unless he intends to claim now that he was in the restroom at the time of Shaw's quiz that evening)!

sent along for no particular reason. "The unkindest cut of all is that another is on the way," Lehman told Shreffler in July: "Now we know how London felt during the Blitz."

THE SICK MAN

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT SHERLOCK HOLMES, WHO IS A DETECTIVE. IT BEGINS THE SAME WAY AS ANOTHER STORY CALLED THE CARDBOARD BOX. THE REST OF THE STORY IS PROBABLY THE SAME TOO.

Obviously Shreffler was becoming compulsive about these things. Even the tolerant Lehman suggested that Shreffler had autobiographical reasons for this particular title.

"...many a strange tale..."

On the cold and windy night of November 3rd, the Plainsmen learned how far one could descend from Missouri Repertory's popular version of Sherlock Holmes. The occasion was a performance of The Hound of the Baskervilles by the Wyandotte Players, at Kansas City (KS) Community College. "The set was wonderful," Lehman remarked ruefully afterwards: "A pity there wasn't any acting in front of it." The script had been "bled of action, tension or, eventually, interest," Daily Journal No. 42 lamented. And not only was everything possible told instead of shown, the best parts happening off-stage, but the cast left much to be desired. The choice of a short bearded actor to play Sherlock Holmes, as the last word in arrogance, was probably not the best possible. Some Plainsmen left at the intermission. The Daily Journal included an evocative photograph of MRT's Holmes as if to exorcise the Wyandotte ghost.

A much more satisfactory evening was the Feast of the Blue Carbuncle on December 27th. The Maggie Jones's roast goose was as good as ever, and Carolyn Underwood gave the paper that later won her the medal for the next paper accepted by a major Sherlockian journal: "Sherlock Holmes and the Fair Sex: Reopening the Case", which appeared eventually in the September '85 Baker Street Journal. (Though mean enough to rule Lellenberg ineligible, at least Lehman had the decency not to award the medal to himself. September 1984's BSJ had already carried his fine review of "Missouri Repertory Theatre's Performance of The Speckled Band", and the March '85 BSJ reprinted his hilarious Daily Journal No. 42 spoof "Doomed Grooms of the Canon", which had been inspired by the Plainsmen marriages occurring about that time -- Lellenberg's, Perry's, Carmack's, and Lehman's own. The BSJ even reprinted Logan Clendening's 1937 "Personal Recollections of Sherlock Holmes" in December '85, but Dr. Clendening at least could legitimately be ruled ineligible on justifiable grounds of being dead.)

The first meeting of 1985 did not occur until the unusually late date of June 8th, when Philip Shreffler came to town once again, in his new capacity as editor of The Baker Street Journal. Despite short notice and hastily made



Bill Wright
eyes the suspects



Daisy Wright
examines a clue



Nola Wright,
perfectly poised



Lenore Carroll
and a rare glimpse of
her indulgent husband

arrangements at The Maggie Jones, John Lehman met the occasion by presenting Shreffler with a pirate edition of the Canon, in which not a single Sherlock Holmes story was featured; a Big Chief tablet and a box of crayons; and a self-help book, How to Be a Grouch, to get Shreffler into the proper editorial mood. "I love this group," Shreffler muttered cynically.

August 1st, according to Daily Journal No. 44, is a date "forever fixed in Plainsmen annals as a mighty highlight in the scion's history." This was the day that the famous Sherlockian writer Michael Hardwick came to Kansas City during his speaking tour of the Colonies. Hardwick, the author (both alone and with his wife Mollie) of some of the best-known nonfiction books and pastiches about Sherlock Holmes, had journeyed to Kansas City from Tulsa, where he had been Dick Warner's guest at the dedication of Holmes Peak (about which more later) on July 27th.

Hardwick's talk began by dwelling, as an Englishman, upon the strong American influence on the Canon. Not only are many characters and settings American, including the Plainsmen's own Study in Scarlet, but there had been a strong American role in keeping the Canon alive and growing: commissioning The Sign of the Four after the first Sherlock Holmes story made little impression; William Gillette reviving interest in the Master a few years after his "death" at the Reichenbach; and commissioning the Return stories that brought Holmes truly back to life. Hardwick went on to discuss Holmesiana as practiced by the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, recounting the Society's 1968 pilgrimage to the Reichenbach in Switzerland. The Hardwicks had participated as the King and Queen of Bohemia, and for a while they succeeded in convincing the republican Swiss that they actually were royalty.

Less than two weeks later -- not even the Daily Journal records the exact date -- the Plainsmen convened again at The Maggie Jones to hear none other than Richard Warner hold forth. But not about his sacrilegious views regarding Sherlock Holmes in Kansas City; a truce was called on that subject for the night. Instead Warner related his Herculean labors which had finally succeeded in conferring the name of Holmes Peak upon a bald dome-shaped hill-ock in Osage County, Oklahoma. They began in 1981 when Warner learned that one could get a geographical feature named by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. But four criteria must be satisfied: the object must be unnamed; some significance must make it worthy of a name; the name must have some historical connection with the community; and the owners of the land in which the object resides must not object to the name. The first was no great problem; there was some local history to justify a name; and Warner managed to play upon the fact that a few eminent Sherlockians have passed through Tulsa, and even spoken there about Sherlock Holmes. (In Oklahoma, a little literacy seems to go a long way.) But the fourth was hard. The land's previous owner had left it to three parties: Tulsa and Oral Roberts Universities, and the Catholic diocese of Tulsa. The first two proved cooperative if bureaucratic, but the eminence in charge of the third was different. Bishop Eusebius Beltran (sic) turned his cold and haughty countenance away, insisting upon some other name more worthy of his work.*

* Mount Grinch?